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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 003952

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EG](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [IR](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ON BILATERAL RELATIONS,  
BORDER DEPLOYMENT, SUDAN, REFORM

REF: UNDERRINER/MARTIN-HEGADORN MAY 24 E-MAIL EXCHANGES

Classified by Charge Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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1. (C) During a May 25 meeting with the Charge, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit expressed satisfaction with the respective visits of Prime Minister Nazif and First Lady Laura Bush. The visits had, in his view, improved the atmosphere in the relationship. Aboul Gheit warned against any USG flirtation with "moderate" Islamist elements, citing Iran's Islamic revolution as an example of the dangers inherent in a rise to power by Islamic fundamentalists. On a potential Egyptian border guard deployment to the Gaza and Israeli borders, Aboul Gheit said that an agreement with Israel had not been reached, asserting that the ball was in Tel Aviv's court. On Sudan, Aboul Gheit listed Egypt's contributions to the African Union's (AU) mission in Darfur, and complained that the AU was slow in taking up GOE offers. Egypt agreed that it was important to bring northern Sudanese opposition groups into the constitution-drafting process and would encourage them to reach agreement with Khartoum. End summary.

2. (U) During the 40-minute meeting, the Foreign Minister was joined by Chief of Cabinet Sameh Shukry, Cabinet staff member responsible for American affairs Mohamed Aboulkheir, Deputy Assistant Minister for North American Affairs Atef Salem, and North American Affairs Office Director Ashraf Swelam. Poloff (notetaker) accompanied the Charge.

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Bilateral Relations Strong; Nazif, FLOTUS Visits Helpful  
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3. (C) The Foreign Minister characterized the recent visit of Prime Minister Nazif to the United States as "excellent." The visit served to remove much of the "soiled air" and bad feelings that the Foreign Minister felt had clouded his own visit to Washington in February - a visit he said had resulted in much "heated debate" in Cairo. The Prime Minister's visit, he continued, contained a fair amount of "harsh debate," yet appeared to have put us "back on the same wave length." Again referring to the acrimony he had felt during and after his own visit to the United States, Aboul Gheit said that he had delivered the same basic message to the USG regarding coming domestic reforms but had not been heard. "Thank God," he added, that we are beyond this stage and can focus on our "truly strategic relationship." Similarly, the public comments made by First Lady Laura Bush during her recent visit, he said, were "very balanced" and "will be helpful."

4. (C) Referring to media speculation that Washington is considering opening or expanding ties to moderate Islamic forces in the Middle East, Aboul Gheit warned against policies that could lead to destabilization in Egypt. A moderate, stable Egypt is in the interest of the United States, he stated. Noting upcoming elections in Iran, Aboul Gheit added that Islamic fundamentalists once in power are nearly impossible to remove. It is imperative, he added, that there be a separation between government and religion. Listing Islamist-inspired violent attacks on past and present Egyptian leaders, Aboul Gheit implored the U.S. and Europe to listen to and understand the Islamists, but not to encourage them in any way, or be perceived as encouraging them. He agreed with the Charge's observation that we followed a careful policy in Egypt.

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Egypt-Israel Border Guard Deployment Issue Drags On  
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5. (C) Asked about his recent public statements on discussions with Israel over a prospective border guard deployment, Aboul Gheit clarified that he had confirmed to a reporter that Egypt was considering a total deployment of up to 2,250 troops along the entire Rafah-to-Taba border with Israel, including 750 specifically located along the Gaza border. The talks with Israel, he explained, had not concluded and remained the purview of security officials from both sides. The sticking point, he stated, remained the

permanence of the Egyptian deployment and disagreement over an Israeli demand that the deployment be reviewed annually and potentially vetoed by Israel. Once that deployment is made, he insisted, Egypt alone would be responsible for the decision to remove those troops. Israeli Foreign Minister Shalom had raised the subject with him in their recent meeting on the margins of the World Economic Forum in Jordan, he said, but Aboul Gheit said he had replied that the ball was in Israel's court since Egypt's last written communication had not yet been answered. For the time being, Aboul Gheit added, the issue is "not moving."

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Sudan Issues  
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16. (C) The Charge raised Sudan, noting Washington's continued interest in developments there and expressing appreciation for Egypt's efforts to assist with relief efforts in Darfur. Responding, Aboul Gheit noted the May 24 visit to Cairo of African Union President Konare and listed Egypt's specific contributions. Furthermore, he said that those contributions were less than had been offered to the AU, which was sluggish in responding to the Egyptian offers. In addition to the one thousand Egyptian troops being prepared for final deployment to the UN's North-South monitoring mission, Egypt had offered 50 officers, Aboul Gheit noted, from which the AU had taken only 23. Egypt had also offered 150 police officers, of which the AU had only taken 31; 100 military observers; and three staff officers to assist with troop movements and logistics, two of whom had been accepted by the AU. Aboul Gheit complained that the AU was not responding, and was "slow to take up Egyptian offers." Still, he added, Egypt stands prepared to assist in whatever way is requested in Sudan. (Note: Aboul Gheit instructed his staff in Arabic at this point to put together a paper listing Egyptian contributions and offers of assistance to the African Union to share with Members of Congress in Washington. End note.)

17. (C) The Charge asked Egypt to encourage prominent Sudanese northern opposition figures Mohamed Mirghani and Sadiq al Mahdi and their respective organizations to participate in ongoing debate over the drafting of a new Sudanese constitution, as planned for in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (ref e-mail exchange). Aboul Gheit said that during a meeting the previous week with Mirghani, the Sudanese opposition figure said that he was eager to meet with GOS negotiators to complete a deal between the National Democratic Alliance (NDA, also headed by Mirghani) and the government. The Foreign Minister said that the delay in reaching a deal had to do with difficulties between Mirghani and Dr. Garang as well as pressure from Eritrea on the NDA, but that the two sides might meet in Cairo May 29 to reach an agreement. In any case, Aboul Gheit said, he had passed the information to Egyptian Intelligence Chief Soliman, who had the lead on the Sudan file.

18. (U) Khartoum minimize considered.

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GRAY